ABSTRACT OF THE INVENTION

In scalable multi-process and possibly multi-node application environments, the management of sensitive data, such as cryptographic keys, is complicated by the number of processes, the frequency at which they are created and destroyed, and by the desire to avoid storing any keys in the clear in these processes or in data files. The present invention defines a central autonomous process, called the Key Repository process, which is tasked with many functions, including controlling and limiting the distribution of the relevant sensitive information, authenticating operators and policy owners, and performing key renewal operations. The Key Repository process is initiated by multiple acts of human intervention, in combination, thus allowing for the shared responsibility of ownership. Once the Key Repository process is initiated and configured, it enforces the policy decisions of the enterprise. At no point is the sensitive data written to the disk in the clear.

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